

Report To: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 18th February 2014

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Eryl Williams/Karen Evans

Report Author: Karen Evans

Title: National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement

1. What is the report about?

The purpose of this report is to update Members on developments in relation to school improvement services and to approve the new National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement.

This report has been prepared in collaboration with the other five LA's in North Wales and will be presented at Cabinet in each LA.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The Hill Review set out a number of options for improving the delivery and structure of education services in Wales. One of the key options was that there needed to be greater consistency in the delivery of school improvement services via the regional education consortia. This view was endorsed by local government through the WLGA response to the Hill Review in September 2013.

A subsequent key commitment on the part of local government has been to co-construct a National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement (hereafter referred to as the Model) with the Welsh Government. The aim of the Model is to bring consistency and stability to the local authority regional school improvement services which is in line with the WLGA response to the Hill Review.

The work to develop the Model took place during November 2013 with representatives of local authority Chief Executives, Directors of Education, Directors of Finance and Directors of Human Resources closely involved in the process. In order to achieve this deadline, a number of working groups were established, involving local government officers, education experts and Welsh Government civil servants. These groups have worked on different aspects of the Model including clarity over the definition of school improvement, governance and commissioning, budgets and business planning for regional services.

The Model was agreed by the Minister and the WLGA Coordinating Committee in late November 2013. There has been a very tight timescale to undertake this work but it has been genuine co-construction. Inevitably there have been concessions on all sides.

3. What are the Recommendations?

Members discuss and approve the proposed National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement. **Appendix 1**

Agree the recommendation:

“that the National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement be adopted and that a business plan be developed with the intention that the additional services listed in the Model be incorporated into the GwE regional model, in phases, subject to a satisfactory business case for each and a supporting transition plan to ensure service continuity and performance”.

4. Report details

The Model outlines a consistent approach to school improvement activities such as how to undertake school-to-school support which is a key part of moving towards self-improving schools. The Model aims to encourage schools to take more responsibility for their own improvement. The Model also looks to clarify issues such as what activities could usefully be undertaken at a local authority level and what activities are best addressed regionally.

A key section of the document covers the governance arrangements in relation to regional collaborative school improvement services. The current statutory position is retained and responsibility for school improvement rests with the individual local authorities. The Model suggests that governance is best placed in a Joint Committee and in line with the legal requirements of the Local Government Act 1972; members of the Joint Committee would be appointed by the constituent local authorities. This group would be supported by an executive board which would cover more operational issues in relation to the regional service.

As part of the new arrangements, it was agreed that a common business plan template was required to enable consortia to clearly identify their key priorities for the year and the expected outcomes. The Minister for Education and Skills will use the plans as the basis of an outcome agreement with consortia, and will formally accept (or not) the plans on an annual basis. The process of submitting and signing off a business plan should be completed by the end of March of each year.

Through regular Review and Challenge events (formerly stocktakes), Welsh Government will monitor progress against and hold consortia and local authorities to account for their performance against the priorities and outcomes noted in the business plans. The plans must be:-

- focused on strategic outcomes;
- dovetail effectively with the outcomes identified in statutory local authority plans;
- deliver national and local priorities to impact on outcomes for learners;

- used to inform democratic accountability arrangements; and
- informed by effective data analysis and need.

It is envisaged that consortia will have, within the guidance set out in the Model, other bespoke arrangements for effective strategic planning, governance and decision making, clear performance management and accountability arrangements internally and to constituent local authorities, self-evaluation, quality assurance, local authority level implementation action plans, managing risks and robust financial planning.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

This report contributes to the Corporate Priority of improving performance in education and the quality of our school buildings.

6. Equalities Impact

There are no equalities impact implications arising directly from this report.

7. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

In October 2013, the Minister for Education and Skills issued a written statement, outlining his acceptance of the proposal from local government to protect school improvement funding within the local government budget settlement and to jointly construct a National Model for Regional Working.

The agreement replaces the proposal, in the Hill Review, to fund regional school improvement services through a transfer out of the RSG. It agrees Local Authority contributions to school improvement functions will be protected on the basis of the methodology and funding identified in papers submitted to the Distribution Sub Group and Finance Sub Group.

The amount is based on the minimum amount originally proposed top-slice (£19.2m), reduced by the average percentage reduction in core revenue funding for Wales, as announced in the Final Local Government Settlement for 2014-15. This equates to 3.4%.

The individual authority allocations are based on the Mainstream Schools' sector Standards Spending Assessment distribution as contained in the 2014-15 Final Settlement. The Mainstream Schools' sector comprises the main service areas relating to Primary, Secondary and Special education provision.

In the case of GWE:-

Additional funding to meet the sums identified in the National Model will only be transferred to GWE as and when the functions transfer. This will be in accordance with the milestones identified in the Business Plan and subject to the full compliance with the recommendation at 4 above.

8. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

There are no equalities impact implications arising directly from this report.

9. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The Model has been developed through engagement with local government officers, education experts, civil servants, WLGA and the Welsh Government.

On-going consultation with school leaders, governors, school improvement officers, neighbouring authorities and the Welsh Government will be required in developing the regional 2014/15 business plan.

10. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The cost of the regional service has been agreed through the service level agreement. Additional costs will be negotiated once the business plan has identified further services to be transferred to GwE within the context of the national model.

11. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

To reduce any risks to school support and challenge in Denbighshire schools, Education Officers within the Authority monitor and assess the quality of the Regional Education Service (GwE).

12. Power to make the Decision

Articles 6.1 and 6.3.4(b) of the Council's Constitution

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